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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE RESPONSE: BELGIAN OFFERS EUROPEAN VIEW ON DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE WORKING GROUP SESSION

REF: SECSTATE 14201

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Belgian MFA human rights expert Nathalie Rondeux called Poloff February 19 from Geneva to provide the European view, with Belgian nuance, on the Durban Review Conference Working Group. Rondeux said the Durban process was very important to Europe; Europeans are excited the U.S. is participating. She said having partners at the conference like the U.S., Australia and Switzerland is better than Europe alone against the world. Europe wants a successful conference, as long as certain red-lines are not crossed. The key concerns Europeans have parallel U.S. concerns provided in reftel, particularly attempts to use defamation of religion arguments to limit freedom of expression and a several issues pertaining to the Middle East (Israel bashing, Holocaust denial, or backward movement on anti-Semitism). Outcomes Europe will attempt to achieve are clear references to fighting anti-Semitism, the denying the Holocaust, and censuring sexual orientation. The Europeans also support discussing the link between racism and conflict. The Europeans also think education and democracy should be mentioned as positive forces in ending racism. Basically, Europe will oppose the discussion of new issues and focus on implementation of what was agreed to in Durban. Europe and Belgium will work hard to obtain a positive outcome, and walk out if this is not possible. End Summary.

¶2. Belgian MFA human rights expert Nathalie Rondeux provided an informative response to reftel demarche February 19 when she called Poloff from Geneva. She made clear she was speaking for the European Union, with Belgian nuances. Belgium, she said, was playing an organizing role as the burden sharer for the preparation of a unified position within the EU. She heads the Belgian team preparing the draft paper for internal EU debate. She added that Belgium had the most expertise on this issue, having held the EU presidency in 2001 during the Durban conference. Furthermore, Belgium was a member of the preparation conference for the Geneva Review Conference, and remained at the table in Durban after U.S. departure in 2001 to attempt to achieve a desirable outcome.

Basic European Position and Concerns

¶3. (SBU) The EU views the conference as a review exercise to implement agreements based on the document agreed to in Durban in 2001. Rondeux said that Belgium fully agrees the process will be difficult and understands U.S. concerns. The main concerns the EU and Belgian delegations will be watching for are Middle East issues and moves to limit freedom of expression through defamation of religion arguments. Rondeux promised that Belgium would stay and fight as hard as possible. The European position is that remaining engaged is important. Leaving is a serious option, but only for the right reason and at the right moment.

¶4. (SBU) Europeans agree with the U.S. on past reparations. Finding a compromise in 2001 was challenging. Rondeux mentioned a paragraph accepted in 2001 on addressing the colonial past. As part of its implementation, Belgium received a visit by Durban parties who looked the treatment of people of African descent in Belgium. Belgium will also mention a recent exposition it held on its colonial past. The European delegation will not accept claims that nothing has been done since Durban.

¶5. (SBU) The Middle East is an area where several challenges could arise. The Middle East was mentioned in Durban, so the EU would consider discussing the region. However, inflammatory language should be avoided. Particular concerns are anti-Israel statements, Holocaust denial, or a push to weaken the fight against anti-Semitism. The crisis in the Middle East should not be a focus of discussion. She asked rhetorically, why not bring up Sudan or any number of other regions?

European Goals

¶6. (SBU) Agenda items Europe will push for at the conference include a clear reference to the fight against anti-Semitism and an agreement that discussion of the Holocaust should not be diminished. Europe will also push for the mention of sexual orientation in the text, which Rondeux admitted would be tough. She said it was also important to bring up racism as a source of conflict linked to genocide and ethnic cleansing, and the related responsibility of states to

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protect populations from war crimes and crimes against humanity. Europe will also raise the importance of education and democracy in combating racism.

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